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For B2B brands, the fact that most deals take place offline and still rely heavily on face-to-face interaction between prospective customers and sales reps, can make it tempting to dismiss the importance of the B2B website. However, underestimating how important an effective website is even—and perhaps especially—to B2B users, is a big mistake.

The fact that users don’t buy your B2B products or services online does not mean that the website can’t and doesn’t play a crucial role in the decision-making process. In this article we’ll discuss why having an effective website is so important for B2B

brands, and suggest practical tips for improving usability and overall site experience.

Why an effective B2B site experience matters

Visiting a B2B website is a natural step in the process of researching a new product or service offering on behalf of a company. So even if a prospect first hears of your company at a trade event or via word-of-mouth, for example, you can rely on the fact that he or she will later visit your website to find more information or be reminded of key selling points.

In terms of the reasons your company's B2B website needs to act as more than a mere brand domain holder, consider how much work is required to get someone to buy something relatively insignificant and inexpensive, like a pair of sneakers, online. Now consider how the stakes are elevated when the decision is not about a pair of sneakers but an element of business infrastructure that may cost tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars and will have a major impact on the way a company operates.

Acknowledging that in one example the website is selling a physical good, where in the other it is only persuading the user to take the next step, the basic fact remains: the website needs to work hard to convince and instill confidence in users.

How B2B websites differ from B2C websites

Complexity

The biggest difference between B2B and B2C websites is usually the level of complexity inherent to the information they're tasked with conveying.

Most B2C products and services are relatively straightforward and don't require too much in the way of supporting documentation or explanation. B2B products and services, on the other hand, can be incredibly complex. This presents challenges, as the website needs to be designed to relay this complex information in a way that is both credible and easily consumable.

Layers of users

All websites have multiple user audiences they must appeal to, but B2B companies in particular need to keep different user groups top of mind when considering UX decisions.

When choosing a new B2B service, multiple stakeholders within a company are usually involved. Most notably there are the executive-level stakeholders who are the ones with the authority to make a decision, and the ground-level stakeholders who will actually use the service or product. Critically, though executives are empowered to make a final decision, they usually seek buy-in from internal users. An effective B2B website needs to find ways to speak confidently to both groups.

Path to purchase

The path to purchase is necessarily longer and more convoluted for B2B sales than for B2C sales. Because costs can be substantial, and many layers of approval are needed before a decision can be made, the lead time to close a sale may be anywhere from months to years.

During this time the prospect will have many points of connection with the brand, and the website is only one of them, but it needs to be a consistently useful one. The website experience should be designed to accommodate deeper exploration depending on the user's familiarity with the brand.

What makes an effective B2B site

There are *a lot* of best practices to keep in mind when designing for B2B, and the needs of each brand are different. However, some key traits of an effective B2B website are as follows:

Fundamentally understands what users are there to do

This means that the brand has done the requisite research to understand what users want to learn or accomplish when they come to the site. The website prioritizes content that serves these needs.

Answers key questions immediately

Because the brand understands its users needs and desires, it is able to answer the user's most important questions upfront, without forcing the user to go too far in search of this information.

Deploys content that mimics user language

The website should speak to users in their own language. How do stakeholders speak about their needs? What words do they use to describe what they're looking for? The brand should ask these questions and then use the findings to reflect users' own language back at them.

Includes clear calls to action

The website encourages users to take the next step with a series of clear calls to action tailored to the individual's interests and browsing patterns.

Offers multiple points of contact

The website ensures that users are able to deepen their connection to the brand

through multiple channels of connection, including phone, email, social, and web-based chat.

Summing up

Effective website design is no less important for a B2B brand than it is for an ecommerce brand. Given the complex nature of B2B services and products, and the elevated stakes of the sales process, B2B websites need to be thoughtfully designed to spark interest and instill confidence in the user.

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